



New Light on Old Crimes

True Ghost Stories - III

By Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

PSYCHIC science, though still in its infancy, has already reached a point where we can dissect many of those

occurrences which were regarded as inexplicable in past ages, and can classify and even explain them—so far as any ultimate explanation of anything is possible.

So long as gravity, electricity, magnetism, and so many other great natural forces are inexplicable, one must not ask too much of the youngest—which is also the oldest—of the sciences. But the progress made has been surprising—the more surprising since it has been done by a limited circle of students whose results have hardly reached the world at large, and have been greeted rather with incredulous contempt than with the appreciation which they deserve. So far have we advanced that of the eighty or ninety cases carefully detailed in Dale Owen's "Footfalls," published in 1859, we find now, sixty years later, that there is hardly one which cannot be classified and understood.

It would be interesting, therefore, to survey some of those cases which stand on record in our law courts and have been variously explained in the past as being either extraordinary coincidences or as interpositions of Providence. The latter phrase may well represent a fact, but people must learn that no such thing has ever been known as an interposition of Providence save through natural law, and that when it has seemed inexplicable and miraculous, it is only because the law has not yet been understood. All miracles come under exact law, but the law, like all natural laws, is itself divine and miraculous.

We will endeavor in recounting these cases, which can only be done in the briefest fashion, to work from the simpler to the more complex—from that which may have depended upon the natural but undefined powers of the subconscious self, through all the range of clairvoyance and telepathy, until we come to that which is beyond all question influenced by the spirit of the dead.

LET us take the case of the murder of Maria Marten, which was for a long time a favorite subject when treated at village fairs under the name of "The Mystery of the Red Barn."

Maria Marten was murdered in the year 1827 by a young farmer named Corder, who should have married her, but failed to do so, preferring to murder her

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in order to conceal the result of their illicit union. His ingenious method was to announce that he was about to marry the girl, and then at the last hour to entice her into an empty barn, where he shot her dead and buried her body. He then disappeared from the neighborhood and gave out that he and she were secretly wedded and were living together at some unknown address.

The murder was on May 18th, 1827, and for some time the plan was completely successful, the crime being more effectually concealed because Corder had left behind him instructions that the barn should be filled up with stock. The rascal sent home a few letters purporting to be from the Isle of Wight, explaining that Maria and he were living together in great contentment. Some suspicion was aroused by the fact that the postmarks of these letters were all from London, but none the less the matter might have been overlooked had it not been for the unusual action of an obscure natural law which had certainly never been allowed for in Mr. Corder's calculations.

MR. MARTEN, the girl's mother, dreamed upon three nights running that her daughter had been murdered. This in itself might count for little, since it may have only reflected her vague fears and distrust. The dreams, however, were absolutely definite. She saw in them the red barn and even the very spot in which the remains had been deposited. The latter detail is of great importance, since it disposes of the idea that the incident could have arisen from the girl having told her mother that she had an assignation there.

The dreams occurred in March, 1828, ten months after the crime, but it was the middle of April before the wife was able to persuade her husband to act upon such evidence. At last she broke down his very natural scruples, and permission was given to examine

the barn, now cleared of its contents. The woman pointed to the spot and the man dug. A piece of shawl was immediately exposed, and eighteen inches below it the body itself

was discovered, the horrified searcher staggering in a frenzy out of the ill-omened barn. The dress, the teeth, and some small details were enough to establish the identification.

The villain was arrested in London, where he had become, by marriage, the proprietor of a girls' school, and was engaged, at the moment of capture, in ticking off the minutes for the correct boiling of the breakfast eggs. He set up an ingenious defense, by which he tried to prove that the girl had committed suicide, but there was no doubt that it was a cold-blooded crime, for he had taken not only pistols but also a pickaxe into the barn. This was the view which the jury took, and he was duly hanged, confessing his guilt in a half-hearted way before his execution.

It is an interesting fact that the London schoolmistress, whom he had trapped into marriage by means of a specious advertisement in which he described himself as a "private gentleman, whose disposition is not to be exceeded," remained devotedly attached to him to the end.

Now here is a case about which there is no possible doubt. The murder was unquestionably discovered by means of the triple dream for which there could have been no natural explanation. There remain two psychic explanations. The one depends upon telepathy or thought-reading, a phenomenon which of course exists, as anyone can prove who experiments with it, but which has been stretched to most unreasonable lengths by those who would prefer any explanation to that which entailed disembodied intelligence.

It is of course within the bounds of remote possibility that the murderer thought of the girl's mother upon three successive nights and also upon the scene of the crime, thus connecting up the vision of one with the brain of the other. If any student thinks of the more probable explanation he is certainly entitled to accept it.

ON the other hand, there is a good deal of evidence that dreams, and especially early-in-the-morning dreams just before the final waking, do convey information at times which seems to come from other intelligences than our own. (Continued on page 62)

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Taking all the facts, I am of opinion that the spirit of the dead woman did actually get in touch with the mind of the mother, and impressed upon her the true facts of her unhappy fate. It is to be remembered, however, that even those who advance telepathy as an explanation of such a case are postulating a power which was utterly unknown to science until this generation, and which itself represents a great extension of our psychic knowledge. We must not allow it, however, to block our way to the further and more important advances which lie beyond it.

For purposes of comparison we will now take another dream case which is perfectly authentic.

UPON Feb. 8, 1840, Edmund Norway, the Chief Officer of the ship *Orient*, at that time near St. Helena, dreamed a dream between the hours of 10 P.M. and 4 A.M. in which he saw his brother Nevill, a Cornish gentleman, murdered by two men. His brother was seen to be mounted. One of the assailants caught the horse's bridle and snapped a pistol twice, but no report was heard. He and his comrade then struck him several blows and dragged him to the side of the road where they left him. The road appeared to be a familiar one in Cornwall, but the house which should have been on the right, came out upon the left in the visual picture. The dream was recorded in writing at the time and was told to the other officers of the ship.

The murder had actually occurred and the assassins, two brothers named Lightfoot, were executed on April 13 of that year at Bodmin. In his confession the elder brother said: "I went to Bodmin on February 8, and met my brother. . . . my brother knocked Mr. Norway down. He snapped a pistol at him twice but it did not go off. He then knocked him down with the pistol. It was on the road to Wadebridge." (The road which had been seen in the dream.) "We left the body in the water on the left side of the road coming to Wadebridge. My brother drew the body across the road to the water."

The evidence made it clear that the murder was committed between the hours of ten and eleven at night. As St. Helena is roughly in the same longitude as England the time of the dream might exactly correspond with that of the crime.

THESE are the actual facts, and though they may be explained, they cannot be explained away. It appears that Norway, the sailor, had been thinking of and writing to his landsman brother just before going to his bunk. This might possibly have made subsequent vision more easy by bringing the two men into rapport.

There is a considerable body of evidence to prove that during sleep there is some part of us, call it the etheric body, the sub-conscious self, or what you will, which can detach itself and visit distant scenes, though the cut-off between sleeping and waking is so complete that it is very rarely that the memory of the night's experience is carried through.

Thus it can easily be conceived that the consciousness of the sailor, drawn to his brother by recent loving thoughts, went swiftly to him in his sleep, and was so shocked to witness his murder that it was able to carry the record through into his normal memory. The case would resolve itself, then, into one which depended upon the normal but unexplored powers of the human organism, and not upon any interposition from the spirit of the murdered man. Had the vision of the latter appeared alone, without the accompanying scene, it would have seemed more probable that it was indeed a post-mortem apparition.

FOR the next illustration we will turn to the records of American crime. In this case, which is absolutely authentic, a man named Mortensen owed a considerable sum of money, \$1,500, to a company which was represented by the Secretary, Mr. Hay. The transaction occurred in Utah in the year 1901.

Mortensen beguiled Hay to his private house late in the evening and nothing more was heard of the unfortunate man. Mortensen's story was that he paid the money in gold, and that Hay had given him a receipt and had started home with the money, carried in glass jars. When the police visited Mortensen's house in the morning they were accompanied by Hay's father-in-law, an aged Mormon named Sharp, who said, "Where did you last see my son-in-law?"

"Here," answered Mortensen, indicating a spot outside his door.

"If that is the last place you saw him," said Sharp, "then that is where you killed him."

"How do you know he is dead?" asked Mortensen.

"I have had a vision," said Sharp, "and the proof is that within twenty-four hours, and within one mile of the spot where you are standing, his dead body will be dug up from the field."

There was snow on the ground at the time and next morning, December 18, a neighbor observed some bloodstains upon it not very far from Mortensen's house. They led to a mound shaped like a grave. The neighbor procured a spade, borrowing it from Mortensen himself, and speedily unearthed the body of Hay. There was a bullet wound at the back of his head. His valuables had been untouched, but the receipt which he was known to have carried to Mortensen's house afforded sufficient reason for the murder.

THE whole crime seems to have been a very crude and elementary affair, and it is difficult to see how Mortensen could have hoped to save himself, unless indeed an immediate flight was in his mind. There could be no adequate defense and the man was convicted and shot—the law of Utah giving the criminal the choice as to the fashion of his own death. The only interest in the affair is the psychic one, for again old Sharp repeated at the trial that in a vision he had

occasionally led him. It was this lobby which he perceived clearly in his dream. His attention was arrested by a man in a snuff-colored coat with metal buttons who loitered there. Presently there entered a small brisk man in a blue coat and white waistcoat. As he passed, the first man whipped out a pistol and shot the other through the breast.

In his dream Mr. Williams was made aware that the murdered man was Mr. Perceval, the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Mr. Williams was greatly impressed and alarmed by this dream, and he recounted it not only to his wife but also to several friends whom he met at the Godolphin mine next day, asking their advice whether he should go up to London and report the matter. To this they answered very naturally, but unfortunately as the event proved, that it was useless and would only expose him to derision.

On the 11th, about ten days after the dream, Mr. Williams narrates how his son, returning from Truro, rushed into the room crying: "Oh, Father, your dream has come true! Mr. Perceval has been shot in the House of Commons."

The deed, as is well known, was committed by a man named Bellingham, who had some imaginary grievance. All the details proved to be exactly as foretold.

WHAT comment can we make upon such an incident? Explain it we cannot, but at least we can get some light upon it by examining the statements of others who have both the clairvoyant and the prophetic faculty. One of these was Swedenborg, who exhibited it again and again, but we have no exact account from him as to how his visions came.

More to the point are the notes of Mr. Turvey, of Bournemouth, a most remarkable psychic. He says:

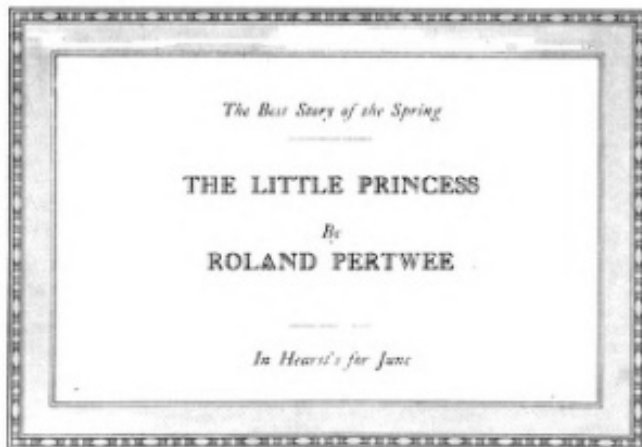
"At certain times I see a sort of ribbon moving like the endless belt of a cinema film. In color it is very pale heliotrope, and seems to vibrate very rapidly. On it are numerous little pictures, some of which appear to be engraved upon the film itself, while others are like pale blue photographs stuck upon the film. The former refer to past, the latter to future events. The locality is judged by the scenery and climatic heat" (felt by the observer). "The dates are judged by the clearness of the pictures."

Mr. Turvey has left it upon record that he saw more unpleasant than pleasant things.

This might be taken as supporting the idea that the visions are for the purpose of warning and prevention. When one considers that in this instance the picture of the lobby of the House of Commons was presented to one of the very few men in Cornwall who would recognize the place when they saw it, it certainly suggests that the vision did not merely happen, but came for a definite purpose.

IT is not to be denied that this and many other prophetic cases strengthen the argument of the fatalist who holds that our life's path is marked out for us. On the other hand, which give a comforting assurance that though the general path may be indicated, there is still a certain play of events which gives room for changes in the issue. Such cases must hearten up those who are overburdened by any prophecy or presentiment. It may be that some force—prayer, perhaps—can divert the stream of fate.

In the fatalists' claim that our life's path is marked out for us based upon scientific evidence? Read "Spirits as an Aid to Justice" in Hearst's for June.



learned the facts. It is not a very clear case, however, and may conceivably have been a bluff upon the part of the old man, who had formed his own opinion as to the character of his son-in-law, and his probable actions. Such a solution would involve a very extraordinary coincidence.

THE next case which I would cite is very much more convincing.

According to the account of Mr. Williams of Cornwall, the chief actor, it was in the early days of May, 1842, that he thrice in the same night had a remarkable dream. Mr. Williams was a man of affairs, and the superintendent of some great Cornish mines. He was familiar with the lobby of the House of Commons into which his interests had

learned the facts. It is not a very clear case, however, and may conceivably have been a bluff upon the part of the old man, who had formed his own opinion as to the character of his son-in-law, and his probable actions. Such a solution would involve a very extraordinary coincidence.

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